

## THE LITERARY LANDSCAPE

# Hometown Humanities

## A new program for small Montana communities

Humanities Montana – our state’s independent, nonprofit affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities — aims to enrich the lives of all Montanans by fostering inquiry and stimulating civil and informed conversations about the human experience. But reaching the smaller towns and rural communities in a state so geographically vast can be a challenge.

Says program director Kim Anderson, “The small towns across Montana offer great possibilities for humanities-based programming. We reach many of them through our Speakers Bureau and Speakers in the Schools programs, and through grants given to small local libraries and other community organizations. But we wondered what would happen if we supported more sustained programming in a single community.”

That’s where the idea for Hometown Humanities came from.

Hometown Humanities, a new program announced last summer, brings a year’s worth of humanities-based programming to a single Montana community.

“Basically we open up our program catalog to a town,” says Anderson. “We provide speakers, help them design community conversations, and can suggest a variety of reading and discussion programs. Or we just work together to come up with humanities-based programming that we think will have strong appeal in that particular community.”

Hometown Humanities debuted in Miles City, announcing its presence in August 2012 at the Custer County Fair. Programming started the following September with a talk at the Art and Heritage Center titled “Social Marketing for Change” by Sarah Keller, a member of the Humanities Montana Speakers Bureau.

After that, new speakers and discussion facilitators arrived every three to four weeks. Talks included “Express to Speak” with Tahj Kjelland, “Homestead Dreams: From High Hopes to Lingering Legacy” with Hal Stearns, “How to Tell a War Story” with David Abrams, “Home, Home on the Ranch” with William Rossiter, “A Trapper’s Tales” with John Stapler, and “Charlie Russell’s Pranks and Stunts as Told by Sid Willis” with Richard Baker.

Hometown Humanities also featured community conversations, including one about diversity with guest speaker and Miles City



Mark Matthews presented “Banned in the Ballroom” at Custer County High School as part of Hometown Humanities in Miles City. (Photo courtesy of Humanities Montana)

native Emily Danforth, who recently won the Montana Book Award for her debut novel *The Miseducation Of Cameron Post* (HarperCollins 2012).

All programs were free and open to the public.

According to Humanities Montana’s website, “The aim of Hometown Humanities is to support deeply the particular cultural interests of a Montana community, and by doing so explore the capacity of the humanities to stimulate reflection, create knowledge, resolve problems and inspire delight.”

“In addition to helping us connect with rural communities,” says Anderson, “Hometown Humanities has served another important goal: connecting with kids.”

Many of the guest speakers who visited Miles City spent time in local schools. Some would give their talks several times over in different classrooms throughout the day, then

offer a presentation that was open to the community in the evening.

William Rossiter, a musician who presents songs and stories about western American history, visited over a dozen classrooms, including those in nearby Garfield and Kinsey. In November, arts and drama teacher Dee Sutter incorporated presentations by Speakers Bureau members Hal Stearns and Scott Prinzing into an “Indian Education for All” day at Custer County High School.

Humanities Montana would like to thank the Miles City leadership committee for helping make the first year of Hometown Humanities a success. “We made great friends there,” says Anderson. “Hometown Humanities would not have gotten off the ground without their guidance, thoughtfulness, and energy. And I hope they’ll continue to see Humanities Montana as a resource for cultural community programming, even though Hometown Humanities has officially moved on. We look forward to many more partnerships with Miles City and surrounding towns.”

Programming in Miles City wrapped up in June, while planning for Hometown Humanities 2013-14 – this time in Dillon – has already begun. Several community leaders were invited to an early planning session at the Dillon Public Library

in May where they learned about Hometown Humanities and brainstormed with Humanities Montana staff about potential programming.

“There’s already a lot of enthusiasm about

the program in Dillon,” says Anderson. “I think Hometown Humanities will be a big hit there.” She adds, “It’s important to remember that Hometown Humanities is just one way we try to reach rural communities. We’re always enthusiastic about partnering with organizations in smaller towns. People should visit our website to see what we have to offer, or contact our office if they have ideas for programming that involves history, literature, philosophy, or any of the humanities disciplines.”

Learn more about Humanities Montana and Hometown Humanities by visiting [www.humanitiesmontana.org](http://www.humanitiesmontana.org), or by contacting the office at 406-243-6022 or [info@humanitiesmontana.org](mailto:info@humanitiesmontana.org).

## Over 80 authors converge for Montana Festival of the Book

The 14th annual Humanities Montana Festival of the Book celebrates the literature of the West with over 80 authors, Oct. 10–12 in downtown Missoula.

Two days and three nights of readings, panels, exhibits, demonstrations, signings, workshops, entertainment, receptions, and other special events are free and open to the public. Venues include the Holiday Inn Downtown at the Park, the Missoula Art Museum,

the Wilma Theatre, and the Missoula Public Library.

The Festival of the Book is one of the biggest cultural events in the Northwest. This year, scheduled events include an evening with Sherman Alexie; a special edition of the popular storytelling event Tell Us Something; the fifth annual Festival Poetry Slam with a special appearance by international poetry slam winner Buddy Wakefield; the annual

Readers and Writers Reception; and Saturday night’s Gala Reading at the Wilma.

Confirmed authors include James Lee Burke, Jamie Ford, Karen Joy Fowler, Robert Wrigley, J. Robert Lennon, Clair Watkins, and many more.

The festival schedule will be available at [www.humanitiesmontana.org/programs/fob](http://www.humanitiesmontana.org/programs/fob) in late August.

## High Plains BookFest celebrates “Women Writing the West”

“Women Writing the West” is the theme for the 11th annual High Plains BookFest, Oct. 24-26 in downtown Billings.

“For the first time in seven years since the Parmly Billings Library established the High Plains Book Awards, 60 percent of the nominated authors are women,” said Writer’s Voice Director Corby Skinner. “It’s a perfect time to honor women writers with a BookFest theme that reflects their contributions to the western vernacular,” he adds.

Keynote authors for the gala reading, 7:30 p.m. Friday at the Babcock Theatre, are three women writers whose 2012 novels garnered national acclaim: Pam Houston (Colorado), Alyson Hagy (Wyoming), and Emily M. Danforth (Montana).

Other highlights include the High Plains Book Award banquet, Saturday, Oct. 26; at the Yellowstone Art Museum; and readings

and panel discussions Thursday-Saturday at various venues in downtown Billings. All events (other than the readings at the Babcock Theatre and the awards banquet) are free.

In conjunction with the BookFest, the Parmly Billings Library established the High Plains Book Awards in 2006 to recognize regional authors and/or literary works which examine and reflect life on the High Plains of the United States and Canada.

According to DeeAnn Redman, the library’s assistant director, 164 books published in 2012 were nominated for the 2013 competition. “That’s double the number of entries from last year,” she said.

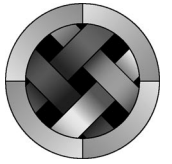
The 2013 awards include two new categories, Best Culinary Book and Best Young Adult Book. The other categories are best fiction, nonfiction, poetry, first book, woman writer, art and photography, and short stories.

The top books in each category are then judged by a panel of published writers with connections to the High Plains. Each winner takes home a \$500 award.

Finalists in all categories are invited to read at the BookFest and are guests at the High Plains Book Awards banquet. “It’s a terrific weekend for writers and readers to celebrate literature of our region,” said Book Awards chair Virginia Bryan.

Pulitzer Prize winning author Richard Ford, whose novel *Canada* is a finalist for the 2012 Book Award in fiction, has agreed to do a reading – his only one in Montana – at 7:30 p.m. Oct. 30 at the Babcock Theatre.

For more information go to [www.highplainsbookawards.org](http://www.highplainsbookawards.org) or contact Corby Skinner at [corby@skinnerbenoit.com](mailto:corby@skinnerbenoit.com).



# 21

## Humanities Montana adds four to board

Four Montanans were recently appointed to the Humanities Montana board of directors by Gov. Steve Bullock: Mandy Smoker Broaddus of Helena, David Irion of Billings, and Carmen McSpadden and Aaron Pruitt of Bozeman. They will serve four years and be eligible for reappointment.

“Montana is so fortunate to benefit from the talent and dedication of these gifted appointees,” said Ken Egan, executive director of Humanities Montana. “They represent a range of critical cultural organizations in the state and will serve Montana well.”

Broaddus is the school transformation director for the Office of Public Instruction and served previously as the director of Indian education. She is also a distinguished poet and a member of the Assiniboine and Sioux tribes.

Irion is the president and CEO of the St. Vincent Healthcare Foundation. He previously served as principal of Billings West High School and has extensive background with cultural and charitable nonprofits. McSpadden is the director of the Montana State University Leadership Institute and is a respected scholar of leadership studies.

Pruitt is the associate general manager of KUSM-TV and director of content for MontanaPBS. A Bozeman native, he has served as executive producer for many important Montana documentaries.